



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2017

No. 28

House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
February 16, 2017.

I hereby appoint the Honorable HAROLD ROGERS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2017, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

VETERANS LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of three veterans' bills the House considered this week and passed. I would like my constituents to know how the House is working to better serve our veterans, and I want to specifically focus on the WINGMAN Act, which we passed.

Mr. Speaker, enabling caseworkers to more efficiently handle the casework

that we receive from veterans is critically important. Right now, my office, much like most Members in Congress, is experiencing a tremendously high volume of phone calls and office visits about a multitude of issues; and I welcome that continued energy and interest from my constituents.

I also want to remind everyone that a central function of congressional district offices—perhaps its most important day-to-day function—is to be a clearinghouse for solving a variety of problems for our constituents and a resource to help them. And the caseworkers in our district offices do an exceptional job. That is why enhancing the tools available to caseworkers to more efficiently serve veterans can result in more cases being effectively administered and answers provided to veterans.

This week we took an important step in streamlining this process by passing the WINGMAN Act. This bill would allow caseworkers to access read-only versions of veterans' records without having to first contact the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is if a veteran grants their congressional office this access.

It is important to note that casework staff is already trained to handle this sensitive information as part of their work to serve constituents who are veterans. I was pleased to support this bill and believe it will have a positive result for veterans seeking assistance from my office in Pennsylvania and veterans across the country.

In fact, I did ask for some comments from caseworkers in my office in Wyomissing and West Chester; and I especially want to thank them for the above-and-beyond, 110 percent effort that they are giving day in and day out. Particularly, at this point in time, with such a high volume of phone calls and office visits, they are still getting their casework done.

This bill that we passed in the House will help them further in helping vet-

erans. Jason, my constituent services director, had this to say about the bill:

The accountability piece is extremely important. This will allow us to see a more complete picture rather than just relying on what we are told by the VA. This should also help us triage the inquiries, thereby reducing the number of contacts we have to make to our VA liaisons, something they would probably welcome as well.

Lisa from my West Chester office indicated that she also believes it is a great initiative.

It is important to note the claims process is a lengthy one. It would be beneficial to be able to periodically check in on the record to monitor its progress. Most times veterans say they would just like the VA to let them know that the claim is still being worked on rather than forgotten. It would let our office provide that information without the added steps of contacting VA employees.

Patrick, from my Wyomissing office, a veteran himself, said that:

In my view, it is an interesting concept which would allow us to move more swiftly from information gatherer to advocate for cases that legitimately warrant it. Oftentimes, there is a significant lag time between placing the inquiry and receiving substantive feedback, at which time we will then have to make the judgment if further action is justified. It would also appear to hold the VA more accountable as well to outside eyes, which is also very much needed. So it sounds good to me.

Mr. Speaker, it also sounds good to me, and I believe it will do good for veterans across this country. I am pleased to see it pass the House, and I encourage the Senate to move swiftly on it.

TREDYFFRIN/EASTTOWN WINS MATHCOUNTS
COMPETITION FOR THIRD YEAR

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about MATHCOUNTS, a national program designed to improve math skills among U.S. students. The 2017 MATHCOUNTS competition series will consist of approximately 40,000 students.

Twenty-three schools with 182 students competed in the 32nd Chester

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

H1247

County MATHCOUNTS competition at Great Valley Middle School recently. I want to commend Tredyffrin/Easttown School District, specifically Tredyffrin/Easttown Middle School and also the Valley Forge Middle School of the Tredyffrin/Easttown School District for placing in the top six schools, as well as the following other schools in my congressional district: Great Valley Middle School, Lionville Middle School of the Downingtown Area School District, and J.R. Fugett Middle School of the West Chester Area School District. Congratulations to all schools involved, all students participating.

I want to thank all the teachers, staff, and administrators who helped make MATHCOUNTS an enjoyable, enriching experience for all the students.

DEBATE OVER PUERTO RICO'S FUTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIÉRREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I will speak in Spanish to the people of Puerto Rico. The translation is at the desk.

(English translation of the statement made in Spanish is as follows:)

Mr. Speaker: I am going to speak Spanish, the language of Puerto Ricans because democracy demands transparency and clarity.

The essence of the debate over Puerto Rico's future is the difference between assimilation, represented in the legislation proposed by Resident Commissioner Jennifer Gonzalez (H.R. 260) and the legislation I have introduced (H.R. 900).

I have never excluded statehood. The assimilationists have excluded independence and free association from their proposals.

What my legislation does is simply add balance and corrects a disequilibrium.

From now on, the debate is between the assimilationist leaders and the people, the Puerto Ricanists. Assimilation is not the only option before the Congress of the United States.

My bill proposes free association and independence as options. This is what the Puerto Ricanists propose.

What motivates us? The love of Puerto Rico and defending our heritage; believing that we can be self-sufficient; believing that we can determine our own future without masters; believing in ourselves. The Puerto Ricanists are convinced that we can create jobs in a strong and vibrant economy with people who are innovative, creative and completely capable of determining their own future.

The assimilationist leaders think that we'll starve to death without the United States.

The Puerto Ricanists do not arrest students when they lift their voices in defense of democracy. That is what the assimilationist leaders do.

The Puerto Ricanists believe that first you pay the pensions of working peo-

ple, while the assimilationists prefer to pay American bondholders on Wall Street.

The Puerto Ricanists love and protect the land. The assimilationists want to destroy it by constructing pipelines.

The Puerto Ricanists understand that democracy must flourish. The free expression of the people is sacred. Assimilationist leaders, when they don't like what they hear from the people, call in the riot squad.

Assimilationist leaders haven't attacked what my legislation would do, they have attacked its proponents.

Assimilationists want Members of Congress to only hear their version of the future. They are annoyed because this Member has brought before the Congress the other two options, which, in fact, are the options up for a plebiscite vote in Puerto Rico this year. In Puerto Rico, they want one reality and in the Congress they pretend there is another.

No, with my bill we have balance, truth and transparency. This is democracy. In this Puerto Ricanists believe: debate, discussion, freedom of ideas. Assimilationist leaders throughout history have chased and jailed Puerto Ricanists, and when they did not jail them, they took them to Cerro Maravilla.

Assimilationists say the Puerto Ricanists are anti-American. No, the Puerto Ricanists and anti-colonialists. They want for Puerto Rico the sovereignty enjoyed and celebrated in the United States. Yes, the Puerto Ricanists want the same thing the Americans have, to live in a free and sovereign nation where we determine our own destiny without masters.

Puerto Ricanists see the sun and see the energy we can harvest; see the land and the food we can eat.

Puerto Ricanists are motivated by love of country, love of our heritage and the understanding that we can be great, that we are intelligent and capable of innovation and creativity.

From my infancy in exile in the United States I listened to the song "Preciosa" and came to understand that the tyrant—the dark evil—is American colonialism. So said Rafael Hernandez, the singing conscience of my people.

Puerto Ricanists longingly recall the song "En mi Viejo San Juan (In my Old San Juan)" where it says "this strange nation," just as Puerto Ricans in the U.S. say "this is not my land"—when they confront abuse, discrimination and racism. "Puerto Rico is."

The Puerto Rican is his diaspora, from New York to Chicago, San Juan to Ponce, we are all Puerto Ricans. As our national poet, Juan Antonio Corretjer, wrote: "I would be Puerto Rican even if I were born on the moon." To which I would add, with a great deal of respect, "I would be Puerto Rican, even if I lived on the moon."

Señor presidente: Voy a hablar en español, el vernáculo de los puertorriqueños porque la democracia exige transparencia y claridad.

La esencia del debate acerca del futuro de Puerto Rico es la diferencia entre el asimilismo, representado por el proyecto presentado por Jennifer González, y el que yo presenté.

Yo nunca he excluido la estadidad. Los asimilistas han excluido la independencia y la libre asociación.

Lo que hace mi proyecto es sencillamente traer balance, corregir un desequilibrio.

De aquí en adelante, el debate es entre los líderes asimilistas y el pueblo, los puertorriqueños. La asimilación ya no es la única opción ante el Congreso.

Mi proyecto propone la libre asociación y la independencia. Eso es lo que proponen los puertorriqueños.

¿Qué nos motiva a los puertorriqueños? El amor a Puerto Rico; defender su herencia; creen que podemos ser autosuficientes; creen que podemos determinar nuestro futuro sin tener amos; creen en sí mismos. Están convencidos que podemos crear empleos, con una economía fuerte y vibrante de un pueblo innovador, creativo, y totalmente capaz de determinar su propio futuro.

Los líderes asimilistas piensan que nos morimos de hambre sin los Estados Unidos.

Los puertorriqueños no macanean a los estudiantes cuando levantan su voz en defensa de la democracia—eso lo hacen los líderes asimilistas.

Los puertorriqueños creen que primero hay que pagar las pensiones al pueblo mientras los asimilistas prefieren pagar los bonistas norteamericanos de Wall Street.

Los puertorriqueños aman y protegen su tierra. Los asimilistas quieren destruirla construyendo un gasoducto.

Los puertorriqueños entienden que la democracia debe florecer. La libre expresión del pueblo es sagrada. Los líderes asimilistas, cuando no les gusta lo que escuchan del pueblo, llaman a la fuerza de choque.

Los líderes asimilistas no han atacado lo que propone mi proyecto. Ellos atacan al proponente.

Los asimilistas quieren que los congresistas solamente escucharan su versión del futuro. Están molestos porque este congresista ha traído antes el Congreso las otras dos alternativas, que de hecho, se van a votar en el plebiscito de Puerto Rico. En Puerto Rico quieren una realidad, y los asimilistas en el Congreso quieren pretender que hay otra.

No, con mi proyecto, aquí va a haber balance, verdad y transparencia: esa es la democracia, en eso creemos los puertorriqueños—el debate, la discusión y la libertad de ideas. Los líderes asimilistas, a través de la historia han perseguido y metido a los puertorriqueños en la cárcel, y si no en la cárcel, los llevan hasta Cerro Maravilla.

Los asimilistas dicen que los puertorriqueños son antiamericanos. No y no. Los puertorriqueños son